

## Dispatches from the Field: Archeology Podcast Transcript

**(Narrator):** Have you ever wondered what archeologists in the park do? Archeologists test sites where they think people may have lived in the past. They also do a lot of testing at potential building sites in the park to make sure that new trails, roads, campgrounds, and buildings don't disturb cultural resources.

You're about to see two projects: a testing trip in high elevation gaps near Balsam Mountain road, and a site excavation in Cataloochee.

**(Erik Kreusch, archeologist):** What we're doing here is we're screening to see if there's an archeological site here that possibly could be impacted by trail work or any other type of project. What we do is take a shovelful and we screen it through a quarter-inch screen and we see if there's anything that tells us something about the people that might have been here, or if there were people here.

This is in a gap, and it's in an area that could potentially be used as a hunting-intercept location. These high elevation areas are also key for harvesting the mast crop in the fall when the chestnuts were here.

This is a first step in a longer process of identifying a site, and then we want to do is we want to find out whether it's significant or not: does it have significance to understanding the prehistory of this area or the history of this area?

**(Narrator):** Sometimes, archeologists find stone flakes or whole stone hunting tools. At homesites, they also find ceramics from pots, and groundstones that were used like a mortar and pestle to crush nuts, seeds, and corn.

If archeologists did find artifacts here, or if the park were planning on building at this site, they might excavate this site as they did in the broad Cataloochee Valley where people have hunted, farmed, or lived for thousands of years. Let's go to an excavation site there to see what happens.

**(Heath Bailey, archeological technician):** We are digging here because there was reported a prehistoric site in this vicinity, and we wanted to be 100 percent that no cultural resources—in this case, subsurface archeological deposits—would be disturbed in the building of a new vault toilet here in the Big Cataloochee Valley.

**(Narrator):** An excavation takes time. Archeologists lay out a grid and carefully dig each square unit down until they reach a new soil layer, which they can tell by changing soil colors or textures. They sift the soil in each layer looking for artifacts. When they hit the bottom of the unit, which is usually a rock layer, they label and photograph it, and move on to the next one.

When archeologists finished all the plots in Cataloochee, they had found a few artifacts. But they decided that the site as a whole looked like a very old riverbed, meaning that the artifacts had been washed there from another place farther upstream. This also meant that the archeologists' job at this excavation was done.

**(Heath Bailey):** As it turns out, what we're dealing with here won't disturb anything intact. So we now know that and have done our job.